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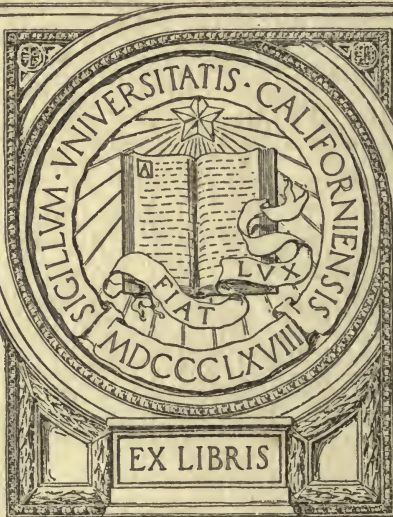
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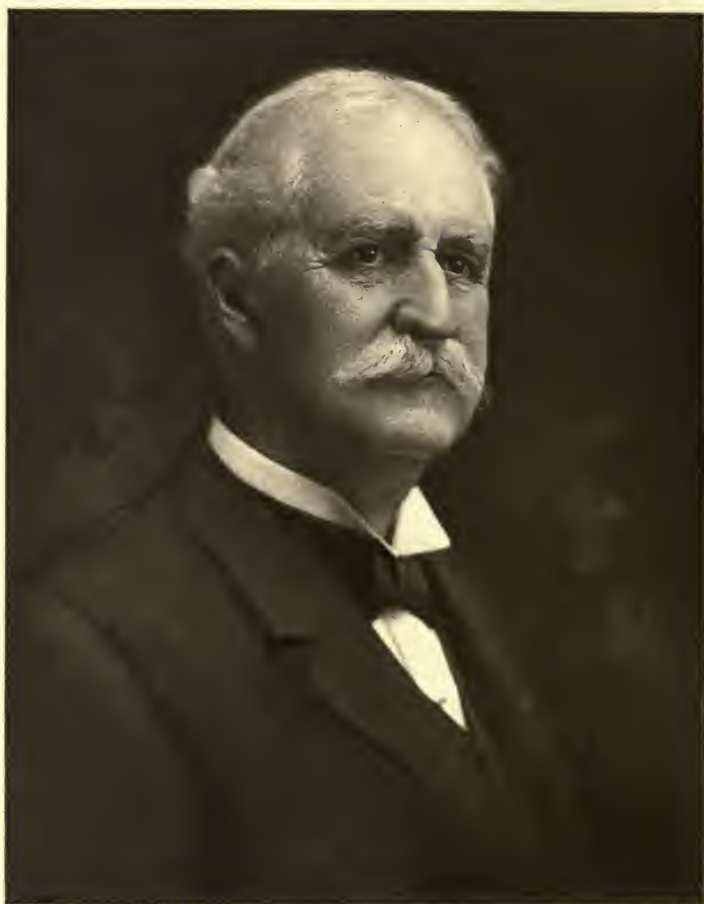


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A. W. Robinson

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

A MEMORIAL SKETCH
WRITTEN FOR HIS FRIENDS, WITH
INCIDENTS AND TRIBUTES

A. B. W.



BOSTON

The Griffith-Stillings Press

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Jeff. H. Johnson
and
Mrs. Jones

TO VARIOUS
ADDRESSERS

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

MEMORIAL SKETCH

By A. B. W.

THE many friends of MR. A. A. ROBINSON, of Topeka, Kansas, will miss his New Year's greeting. He had an instinct for friendship, and his friends were his treasures. It was characteristic of the delicacy of his friendliness, that in whatever stress of fatigue or anxiety the holiday season found him, he insisted upon writing our names with his own hand. Alone he went through his book of addresses, and thought of each of us as his pen traced the name. Today all of us are recalling him: his masterful and blameless character; his constructive and eventful life; and we are making grateful appraisal of his many ways of enriching us. The world has had many men of genius whose ambition and self-emphasis helped them to a great fame. It has had but few men of complete self-effacement coupled with colossal ability. The latter would elude us but for their achievements. Albert Robinson is in this silent class.

When death comes, instantly we feel the impact and weight of a character. Letters of condolence always show unanimity of impression. In this instance, phrases like these were repeated over

[1]

and over: "I named my son for him." "He moulded my character and my career." "From childhood I carried him in a niche of my heart because his personality was unique." "I worked with him thirty years. The most conscientious man in his personal life, the most capable man in his official character, I have ever seen." "He was always the model for us in the '*Old Control*.' He was always the ideal."

The great war has changed us, even our vocabulary is different. He suffered with the rest of the world, and when the last German drive hurled its torments upon us, he was greatly agitated. The woe followed him into his intermittent delirium. Once he waved his wasted hand, and his voice rang out strong once more: "*That thing is wrong, and it must be righted!*" Through the letters of his friends to Mrs. Robinson we find reiterated the phrase, "How glad we are that he lived to see the victory of the Allies." During the last sad weeks, his beautiful little grand-daughter Ellen Catherine was the light of his eyes. Each day she laid her baby self beside him, crooning her joy and loving his face.

Albert Alonzo Robinson was born at South Reading, Vermont, of New England ancestry, October 21, 1844. The name of Robinson is a proud one. He was the son of Ebenezer Robinson, Jr., and Adeline Williams. His father was schoolmaster, carpenter, farmer, and his

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

hands were subtle and cunning. When Albert was three years old his father died of typhoid fever. The little son always remembered being carried to see his dead father. His mother was capable, handsome, and greatly beloved. Her family of four children were a lifelong joy, and the children kept their serious and industrious home life a treasured memory. As a child Albert was extremely shy and sensitive. He was a silent boy, an ambitious student, and a tireless worker. Like his two gifted brothers, when the time came for college, he assumed his own expenses — he worked his way through. All three brothers became civil engineers, and the two older ones college professors. The second son, Stillman Robinson (a gay and mischievous lad), in addition to his classroom labors became a distinguished inventor.¹

These Robinson brothers were a brilliant trio. Tradition says their personal gentleness was al-

¹A certain shoe machine company holds forty-eight of Stillman Robinson's patents. His whole life is a tale of steady drudgery and achievement. Files of class-room and examination papers corrected by his own hand; Sabbaths devoted to coaching his "lame ducks," for he would not have his daily recitations spoiled by intellectual slovens, so to save his best students he drilled his worst ones. Often his nights were spent in solving intricate engineering problems constantly submitted to his department, also in disentangling railroad responsibilities for the safety of the public. His practised technical knowledge foretold the Ashtabula disaster, and he warned the railroad against it. From his home in Columbus, Ohio, he planned the mountings and foundation of the Lick Observatory. Freely he served his city, his university, and the public.

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

ways more astonishing than their genius. Certain it is that young Albert Robinson immediately attracted the personal interest of his college president, who secured for him a position as assistant in the United States Surveys. He was employed about five months of the year in astronomical field work, and in triangulation of the Great Lakes. By acquiring telegraphy he earned the salary of an operator, and also became expert with the heliograph. Work was terrific. The route lay through a primeval jungle of curious juniper, along the northern shores of Lake Superior, where no human foot had penetrated. (Indians find easier trails.) The matted tangle of juniper was shoulder high, often above their heads, through which every inch of the way must be cut. Packhorses stumbled over the gnarled surface roots, and the hoary tangle resisted their axes like teak-wood, while myriads of sand-flies and great "green-bottles" drove the beasts to frenzy. They kicked all the time. They kicked each other. They kicked their masters. The men worked and slept with gloves and veils, but were always stung, and their throats kept swollen even with their chins. But the government survey pushed through on schedule time. Another assistant wrote home, "This living wire juniper stuff, centuries old, is tough enough to tear us all limb from limb, men and beasts alike." It was Robinson's habit to have books on botany in his pack. In that fantas-

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

tic wilderness he found queer mosses, and weird, orchid-like plants uncatalogued. He preserved specimens and sent them to Asa Gray. It is remembered that he spent his evenings slapping venomous insects with his pocket handkerchief, and with the other hand making *herbaria* and fastidious memoranda for the Harvard botanical laboratories. There is a fellowship between men of genius, and in good time their friendships, which bind the earth, are worth all they cost. These groups of unclassified flora from the waste regions of the Great Lakes introduced our young scientist to a choice company; and throughout a long life he was associated with great specialists at home and in Europe.

When Mr. Robinson won his graduation degree at Ann Arbor, he was alarmingly thin, and those who loved him best cried out, "Oh, you weigh less than your bones!" So heavy was the toll of burdens and honors! Happily his body was always a magnificent instrument, and life with chain and compass, in open tents, with the taste of success, gradually restored his health. A spell was in the air. The civil war was finished, and days of expansion had come. A period of empire building was just beginning. There were dreams, and they were charged with dynamic energy. Great sums of money were pledged. Railroads were to cross the Great American Desert, and ardent young spirits snuffed the future from afar,

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

and out to the skyline went the workers,—men of the severest training; men with skill and daring; achieving men. “But we had such a splendid time; and these plains, how I love them, they are a part of my life,” so once spoke Robinson as he gazed out of his car window. You longed to ask questions, but the currents of his life were always deep and silent, like his own canyons, so you contented yourself in watching his face grow tender and reminiscent. Was he thinking of galloping with his friends at nightfall back to camp, merry and black as minstrels with cinders from the fire-swept prairies; or was it freshets, quicksands, whirling dust storms, that he remembered? Perhaps he was thinking of the buffaloes — the unbelievable hordes of rollicking, snorting, pounding, thirst-driven creatures, rushing from wallow to wallow, or was climbing to mountain tops searching for the telltale signs of the watersheds. New cities and terminals must not be on the wrong side, else they will be exterminated by the first cloud-burst or cyclone. Was he outwitting vagabond rivers, those that lie on the top of the ground without any banks? They are east of the camp at night, and flow west of the camp in the morning, spoiling square miles of fair pasturage.

There were many discouragements. Indian and outlaw lurked near isolated encampments, and men were armed to the teeth, but horses and supplies

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

sometimes disappeared. Capitalists were complaining of delays. There was constant exasperation. Once it was over the obliteration of preliminary surveys. As camps shifted, the line of stakes waving their red flannel flags to outline the cryptic maps of exploration, would be found prostrate. Not a single stake could keep its position, and the toil of weeks must be repeated. No one could trace the culprits. Robinson found that the mischief was always wrought in moonlight. Some localities would be constantly robbed. He selected the worst place and watched. From the hot hills came a procession of antelopes in single file, silent and ceremonious as nuns, and daintily nipped away each fragment of flannel and worried every stake to the ground. They were at play.

The rainless days were too short for these gallant horsemen. Early they were out scouring the horizon, selecting the loveliest valleys for the railroad path. They knew how to find them. Gay hearts had escorted wayward rivers to their sources, and discovered the breaks and gaps among piled up peaks, where water has performed her sublime miracles and opened shadowy vistas for the world's traffic. Fearing no evil, they welcomed jokes and dangers. Scouts they were; scholars, and gentlemen. Their youth accepted the challenge to subdue a continent, and they toiled like soldiers under arms. Quivering, blistering heat must bleach the color from their eyes. Horses

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

must ford streams foaming with a succession of rapids, and they must not stumble over burrows and tussocks of the prairie. Neither must they slip on snow-powdered barrens. The sound of crackling, settling ice, or the wash of whirlpools must not bring panic to faithful brutes. Together man and beast often must sleep in the open, perhaps near mines, or coal beds, or oil fields. When tempests like Genii beat them down, again they were off and away, ransacking the West for its secrets and treasure. What are frosts or thirst or hunger to men like these? It is the epic life of empire builders. The excitement of exploration was better borne than the monotony of track laying, and galling drudgery broke the courage of stout men. One of his company remembers the awakening of the camp each morning, by the hoofs of the Robinson horse taking the chief down the tent line to the tracks, where he inspected the previous day's work. Every unlucky tie had to be "fixed." After breakfast he was ahead of the advance parties, always cheerful and more attentive to the comfort of the men than to his own. Many incidents are related of those early days.

One summer, in the hot lands of Arizona, a vine climbed his tent pole and unfurled a great disk of color like a morning-glory. It was thrilling, because not a dot of green trembled in the sun from camp to mirage. Nothing moved but whirlpools of dust in puffs of heat. Every morning a new

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

blossom appeared like a comedian to lord it over the alkali desert. Through the breathless forenoon and high midday it burned from rose to royal purple. Its bodyguard of polished leaves glistened with dew. At five in the afternoon it folded itself. Our botanists traced this witch-plant into the sweet-potato family, and could take it no further. Mr. Robinson began to dig nights to look at the roots, but apparently there was only a slender stem leading into the bowels of the earth. Finally he came to a huge wooden bulk, like an overturned tree stump, and when it was split open, out gushed pure water. The bonnie goblin had secreted for itself a cistern below the line of evaporation. It went to Asa Gray and got a long biographical, unpronounceable name. But the important point was the intimacy established between the two men. Those were not Burbank days. Government experiment stations were scarcely begun, but at Harvard, Science had patient slaves, and to them, too, the West was a flaming prophecy. They knew the buffalo was doomed. Those giddy, restless freebooters must relinquish their grazing grounds to corn and wheat. How long had their sharp hoofs kept the soil loose and sterile as they stampeded from east to west, from north to south, like the indefatigable tides of the sea. Grass must be found strong enough to hold down the tossing sand in spite of scorching, tormenting wind; grass persistent and vital to undermine sage-

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

brush and cacti, to supplant the wild herds and make the earth ready for harvest. Was it to be the coarse, heavy variety that saved the sand dunes of Holland, or must it be the more fragile species from arid Syria? Was it the old tufted pampas grass from South America? Asa Gray sent Mr. Robinson specimens to plant and observe. You can see him on his knees with his magnifying glass examining the roots to see which kind kept the strongest fibers under the novel conditions of the American Desert. When found, the sturdiest root had to come from South Africa. The railroad builders scattered the seed from their saddles when they went to toil, to hunt, to reconnoitre. It was dropped wherever they passed. It was with the wheat from these vast reclaimed deserts that the Allies were fed during the great war.¹

A dreary winter was spent in the basin of the Red River. The survey was almost complete when an instrument gave out. The question arose whether time could be saved by repairing

¹Just this side of the "bad lands" Mr. Robinson pointed to a violet-tinted mesa, and asked, "Can you see those streaks of green along the cracks in those cliffs?" I was just able to discern them. "The soil is very thin out there," he said, "but the grass is getting ahead. It grows hardy as it gets up. It advances about a foot in a year. But sometime it will manage to go over the top and down the other side until it reaches the black lava beds." Instinctively my eye measured the distance between the railroad bed this man had laid and the dim margin of the mesa and realized that a generation ago he had found time to plant that "gift-bearing grass" in the volcanic sand. And there it is getting on.

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

the damage, or whether a duplicate must be sent from a distant city. Mr. Robinson decided to undertake the restoration. He remembered a forge a day's gallop away where there was steel and a clever blacksmith. The crust would not hold up a horse through the day, but at night a rider was safe enough. The moon was full, and he started, with a loaded revolver of small caliber, but without extra bullets. With the blacksmith's assistance he forged a new cylinder with ease, and struck the homeward trail in high spirits. A couple of hours sped away, when he began to hear the musical sound of wolves. The call of the leading wolves for their packs is high falsetto — they are answered in lower key. It is their habit to hunt in small packs of from five to twelve, and he became aware that they were coming from every direction and that soon they would appear on the horizon in numbers that could not be computed. His horse shuddered and stopped. He would back and plunge, but he would not go forward. The rider was without a whip; his right hand steadying his instrument from too heavy jarring. He dismounted and eased the bit, braided the forelocks out of eyes that would never need to see so clearly again. He tightened the girths, screwed his spurs, and mounted. Could he start that horse? It was his own mount, and he spoke the word, and off they went! Now the wolves were facing him. They seemed like

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

a moving fog coming to envelop him. When they came so near that he saw their frosted breath, the horse stopped. Then the wolves stopped. They were the gray timber wolves. The snow was white; the horse was white; the moon was white. There was a deep blue shadow of horse and rider. The wolves began to examine the shadow in groups; and then went back to rejoin their fellows. Gradually the mass divided, most of them going on the right side in company with the shadow, leaving a path which the horse was quick to see. On they went — the horse and rider with the shadow, and the wolves racing on the shadow side. As the horse began to stumble and quiver, the rider stopped. And the wolves stopped. When the horse had rested they went onward together, the creatures intoning and howling. They never crowded nearer than the shadow. With the instinct of the hunter the rider began to realize that the wolves were at play like the antelopes, and his danger would be in the fall of his horse. After reaching camp, it was ascertained that higher up the Red River herds of wild cattle had drifted with the terrible storm and were held on its banks by the surging current. There they were followed by the wolves and the wolves had gorged themselves. Now they were out with the glee of exercise and adventure.

In the pestilential marshes of the lower Missouri River, where the climate is well nigh insupport-

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

able, a levee was to be built. Marshes were to be drained and a roadbed laid. When Mr. Robinson went to take the contract, he found himself supported by gangs of Poles, underfed, undersized, tubercular, fit only for quarantine. The government inspection of immigration was slack in those days. He was apprehensive, and his impulse was to throw up the contract. But time is urgent with a great builder. The men were quarrelsome, insubordinate, and homesick. When a paymaster disappeared with many thousands of dollars due them for wages, they imagined themselves defrauded. Fevered with malaria, bewildered with misery, they attacked the tents of their overseers at night. Robinson, with a revolver in each hand, in nightclothes, went out to the yelling mob of madmen. They had come for him with ropes and gibbet. He spoke a few syllables of their patois and they were induced to disperse. What is there in a man's soul that thus quells a mutiny? Often he was to be in riots and mobs.

From the power to crush mutiny up to one that conquers nature, is but an ascending step. Nature is a hard master. Her splendors and her obstacles give different moods to different minds. Some they will depress; others they will inspire. Grandeur and unchartered solitudes may produce dejection and irritation among the weaklings in a camp outfit. Nostalgia appears even in men of

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

full vitality. To other souls there comes intellectual stimulus—a consciousness of power almost ecstatic. Humboldt tells about it as he faced world wonders everywhere. Agassiz out among the ice masses of Switzerland, toiled in a transport of delight, and the work under his hands flew as with wings. Darwin was like a magnet drawing everything that grew everywhere into the science in which his soul reveled. Albert Robinson had the quality of that high company. Nature's wonders and obstacles so kindled his great nature, so released his rich native endowment, that he worked with the ease of a magician. He was heard to say: "I loved it. We were all of us opening up our own country; every man doing his utmost; each one serving, to the last boy in the pack trains. I could not help seeing the right way for things to be done. I seemed to work with my heart instead of with my head. I ought never to be praised." The cup of life to him was not a drug nor a fatality: it was elixir, a daily restorer, that kept him immune while other men around him burnt out. Through arduous years he maintained his prodigious labors. It is thus that we account for his name being associated with the great engineering feats of his generation.

He built more miles of railroad than any other man. The speed with which he constructed his road when it was extended to the Chicago Termini-

nal, without mistake or loss of harmony among his army of workmen, has never been duplicated. He bridged the Des Moines, Illinois, and Grand Rivers, also many considerable streams; the Missouri, with its shifting bottom, and the mighty Mississippi, all in less than a year. But among engineers, the bridge that opened the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas best shows the originality and power of his genius.

Where the walls of the precipice are sheer for three thousand feet, and the menacing cut is a narrow rock gate filled by the torrential river, there he swung his bridge. Not a footpath was possible through the jaws of that gorge; but he thrust a bridge and its railroad between them. It hangs twenty-five hundred feet from the top of the cliff, held by great steel girders mortised into the rock wall. There it is suspended, five hundred feet above the flood! A magical link it is, two hundred feet long, between the roadbeds east and west of the chasm. It opens to commerce a vast country of surpassing richness, and to throngs of wondering tourists exhibits a marvel of engineering. No railroad in the world runs through so deep a canyon. His bridge is the delight of every consummate engineer. The principle of its construction has been seized upon to meet lesser emergent difficulties in Peace and in War¹

¹In recent Balkan warfare arms of oak were substituted for the steel levers in bridging the many gorges, chasms, and fissures.

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

as well as to compass vast engineering enterprises everywhere. The heavy shadows of the Gorge make photographic representation inadequate; but some day Joseph Pennell will etch the wonder of that bridge. At any rate, Robinson solved the marvel and mystery of the Royal Gorge. It is like romance to hear of the triumphant survey made upon the ice after the baffled engineers of rival roads had abandoned the Gorge as hopeless; of the strenuous warfare and protracted litigation which accompanied and followed the creation of that bridge, and the final mad midnight race of Robinson's engineers to hold it. Thus they won the "Celebrated Case."

When the steel track had been carried from Chicago to the Gulf of Mexico, and on again to the Pacific Coast, Robinson began his career as a railroad manager.

The task of an administrator is spent under grilling care. Also life on the great plains is heavy with responsibility; but sleep "Out There" becomes delicious and potent. In the open air, it is thin and light, and the sun-baked earth acts like a sounding board for the soft-footed night sounds. But the nights restore a man's buoyancy for the bright days. There is game, and migration of birds. In the springtime there are flowers and nests; but men who manage the business of railroads wear an iron yoke. The sense of human life at the mercy of steel and timber is ever with

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

them, like an added faculty. The hiss of competition; the swirl and noise of traffic, in all its complexity and detail, eat like acid. Capital expects dividends. Labor must be paid, and every day is a grapple. Lucky is a great corporation like the Santa Fé when its general manager is beloved all down the ranks. He deals with men at their best and worst, and he must rule with irresistible discipline. It was good to hear of Mr. Robinson when some one winced under him, "Yes, but he is such a splendid gentleman — what man was ever better set up?" He was always the Chief, never the "Boss." The ability successfully to deal with men was instinctive. He controlled men in masses, in committees, offices, and boards; in repair shops, power plants, stockyards, and mines. He knew all kinds of men; juggling financiers, ponderous capitalists, corrupt freight agents, venal contractors, lobbyists. A railroad system must have hospitals, banks, oil wells, rolling stock, refrigerator trains, mail cars, city properties, rich timber lands, and elemental resources which would baffle all but the initiated. Everywhere there must be loyalty and efficiency. For years he swung from altitude to altitude, buying, selling, commanding, investigating, keeping ahead of his own success, searching always and everywhere for men, — the men who could be trusted with public safety. So litigations claimed him, and accidents. There were heart-

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

breaking mistakes among directors and officials. There was corruption, but he was incorruptible. His own learned and laborious life flowed on. No secret bloodhound guilt ever tracked down his spirit. Crime is shy, and he was a man to fear.

Mr. Robinson had been married in 1869 after an engagement of eight years to Julia Caroline Burdick, in Edgerton, Wisconsin. She was a teacher, and their intimacy began when they were schoolmates. She lived until August, 1881, leaving an only child, Metta Burdick Robinson, a delicate little girl, who has become Mrs. Glenwood E. Jones. In 1885 Mr. Robinson was married to Mrs. Ellen Burdick Williams, a sister of the first wife, who still survives him. The hospitality of their home in Topeka is well known, and through the years Mr. Robinson operated the roads he had built, there passed through his doors many social types. Because of his fame as a civil engineer he was summoned to sit in the councils of the European Cabinets, and twice a year he went over the seas. What compensations reached him from those continental discussions upon Conservation, Restoration, Construction!

When from success, and assured position in his own country, he turned his face to Mexico, his friends were surprised that he chose to spend the rich years of his maturity among that turbulent people, yet no one better knew the vast resources

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

of that country. He had confidence in himself, and confidence that the distraught and tragic nation would not always be false to its own physical geography and its own future. The man of granite, Diaz, implacable, unapproachable, severe, and Robinson, patient, with suppressed passion and conviction, became excellent friends. Together they worked for thirteen years for improved sanitation and reforms, until the railroad was taken over by the government. There was always the landlord, the Spanish grandee. Peon and patriot alike were exasperated to the point of insurrection, and every class suffered from the menace of chronic disorder. However, among many responsibilities, he was able to serve the native industries. They needed protection from exploitation by European capitalists. His transatlantic friendships were invaluable during that agitation. Lord Curzon, with Sir Ernest Castle, and other English stockholders of his road, became interested to correct injustice and abuse and the ubiquitous robbery of mines and exports. Ann Arbor, his beloved *Alma Mater*, in recognition of his successful service during that critical period, honored him with its highest tribute — the degree of LL.D. He always loved Mexico and believed in her ultimate destiny. Her patriots trusted him. Banks and embassies eagerly assisted his projects. Popularizing disputed reforms among ignorant, reluctant populations is costly, but he was generous.

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

His private car was the vehicle of an abounding hospitality throughout his railroad life. The guests on his trains hardly suspected the power of his energy. He was still, imperturbable, absorbed with his enthusiasms. A Spanish grammar was his *vade mecum*. Yet a road superintendent insisted that "he eyed every rail of the track. We all believe he would like nothing better than to feel of every spike. His eyes discover every pick and shovel we leave out, and they find the man who forgot them." With characteristic thrift and self-devotion he corrected an inaccurate survey with his own hand, a matter of laborious months, to save his company \$40,000, the price of a new survey. He had developed two principal harbors, one at Tampico, on the Gulf of Mexico, and Manzanillo, on the Pacific coast. He connected them by a line over a mountain range said to be impassable to railroads. He was older and heavier, though again he must be in the saddle. This pitiless labor in the high, tropical altitudes, over uneroded precipices, together with the blunders of subordinates, brought the first symptoms of serious illness. But he had found the great pass over the range, the Sierra Madre!

Mr. Robinson was a man of military type — laconic, reserved, accustomed to a self-discipline of monastic austerity. Underneath his distinguished bearing were hidden sympathy and tenderness beyond telling. Every one knew it. When

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

sunstroke or pneumonia or nervous prostration invaded his staff, he took their burdens in addition to his own, to save them their salaries. When there was protest he laughed and said, "I have always been able to do the work of any four men." In emergencies he worked holidays, Sundays, and evenings. "Railroads and newspapers never rest," he would say. The Robinson brothers could suffer and keep their secret. They could work pallid and faint, and give no sign. When time had turned his curls to silver, and softly uncovered the massive and delicate modelling of his forehead, and sickness had come to abide, behind his brown eyes the spirit of his youth still sang:

"Nothing is too bitter for my high heart."

During his retirement from active business he kept absorbed with scientific interests at home and abroad through learned societies to which he was attached, and they had the benefit of his correspondence. University Clubs in our great cities cherished his membership. He much enjoyed his association with the civic organizations of his own State and city where he met intimate and lifelong friends. Travel and books refreshed him, as his strength slowly ebbed away. A guest saw him with one of the classics open upon his knee, then Mr. Robinson, so shy and incurably modest to the end, ventured the remark: "The poets take too much time. I presume railroad men

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

are almost spoiled for literature. We get trained to think and speak with telegraphic precision, still I am sure most poets take too long to tell it. Poetry to justify its escape from prose ought to bite and sing all the way, like a steel drill."

Through his decline his household was sustained by his own strength and poise. When the final peace came to him, he looked as beautiful as he was, — a majestic soul received into radiant immortality. In the Cathedral Church, beneath the velvet pall with his own orchids above him, he was statuesque. Twenty years after he had left their road, the gentlemen from the Santa Fé offices in Topeka had given him a memorable banquet, at which he was overwhelmed with affection. Now the army of men all down the railway lines whom he had trained and promoted mourned for him. Always to them he was "Robinson the Superb." He was carried in a private car to his own mausoleum at Edgerton, Wisconsin. One of his old friends was thinking of a favorite marble youth in the Vatican, from an antique altar. It is described by Professor Huxley — "Fit for a Temple, because it proves how much finer our humanity is than all we have dreamed or imagined."

Hail, beloved, hail! Farewell, never!

"Time hath no lance to wound thee."

SOME INCIDENTS

ONCE in making a hurried Atlantic passage, unexpectedly he found that Mark Twain occupied the stateroom opposite his own. In the early morning before the decks were washed, Robinson, wrapped in his ulster and carrying his favorite instruments, met Mark, with his fluffy hair and spotless white flannels, looking like a puff out of a box. Mark's hand was out with a "How do you do," as if they had always known each other. "I am on my way to the bridge with these old-fashioned instruments," said Robinson, "to see if I can make with the captain an accurate nautical observation; he doubts if I can do it." "Would you be willing to take me along," said Mark. "Yes," said Robinson jokingly, "if you will get on something warm over those night duds of yours." Robinson satisfied himself, also the captain. During the rest of the voyage he and Mark entertained themselves "over the rail" estimating the distance to passing vessels. Mr. Robinson remarked that he never saw a mind work with such lightning rapidity as Mark Twain's, adding, "Had I ever found an assistant half as quick, he would have gotten ahead of me and taken all my jobs."

Forty years ago, when New Orleans struggled under its war debts, he gave drawings, specifications, and estimates to the city, for a series of double crescent levees

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

which would reinforce the natural and artificial embankments. Thus would be saved the richest silt of the Continent that is every year being lost in the Gulf. This restored soil would furnish a perfect habitat for hemp and fruit. But the city was too embarrassed or too short-sighted to avail itself of his generosity.

At one of the dinners in England, which was a royal function, a lady asked Mrs. Robinson if her husband was not embarrassed by so many honors and ceremonies, and she received the reply: "I do not know why my husband should feel embarrassment. He looks as well and knows as much as any of them; and I am sure he behaves as well."

This from a foreign hotel. "We found his mineral water on our dressers. He built and lighted our fires before we knew we needed them. When we were off on an excursion and he did not always accompany us, he was up before us, out in the cold, examining the buckles and leather, making sure that all was safe."

From a promoted train hand: "No man ever got him, but he sometimes got us. I remember the worst blizzard of the Northwest. I got to be station master. The heavy express had a new engineer. 'Twas late. The storm was thick. There was a heavy grade ahead

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

— the worst on the line. Mr. Robinson comes down my platform brisk, looking the wheels over like his way was, jaunty-like. Then he squinted the engine over. Quick as a wink he tosses up a hand, and shouts into the cab, “You throw out that half bottle of whiskey to me — you’ve got it there under your cushion.” But the critter fumbled with his levers, and began oiling, clever-like. The general manager shouted up again, “Send out that whiskey,” and out it came, and Mr. Robinson caught it like a toy. “Now send out that full bottle behind your flange.” Quick and hard, out it came. I thought it was going to smash his head, but he caught it on the fly, and trudged into my place. It wasn’t my business, but I heard myself say, “You knew he was a drinking man.” “No, but I had to find out. It is a bad night.” All civil, but his eyes flashed into my coal hod. There was peelin’s and paper in it. Then he traipsed out into my telegraph office, hugging the bottles unnatural like. My two stoves were not blacked up very smart; but nobody ever twitted me over it again. I thought my station would blow down the gulch before morning got there.”

Every heart that cherishes him is tender with reminiscence. His bounty was scattered from Boston to Vera Cruz; from Chicago to San Francisco.

A cousin writes: “Do you remember the grapes that were spilled and forgotten when we took dinner in the kitchen of the little wood-colored house on the hill? We went out to enjoy the view. He stayed behind, and picked up every grape under the table and chairs. They rolled behind the flounce of the

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

home-made lounge. They were under the stove, but not one remained to stain the spotless floor our feeble hostess has scrubbed white all her life long."

From "Jack," a porter: "None ob de beasts out on de prairie ever dast tech him. Soon as dey see his cap, dey takes to dair heels mighty quick." Grafters and imposters must have had a similar experience.

This is from a minister: "His scientific, sympathetic care of men was even more remarkable than his own endurance. Men idolized him because they could trust him, and he never failed them."

This was overheard from him concerning another profession. "Ministers do the most difficult thing in the world, and each year they contrive to live, it grows harder for them."

SOME TRIBUTES

From the *Lynn Item*, Massachusetts:

. . . He became President of the Mexican Central Railroad in May, 1893, and resigned in 1906. During that time the track grew from 1,800 to 3,400 miles and its condition was vastly improved. Mr. Robinson was identified with many interests in Mexico, being a director in banks and an investor in many enterprises. Many of these were promoted as feeders to the Mexican Central. Development of the port of Tampico was one of his great achievements. As an expert in railroad affairs his advice was often sought. . . .

From the *Galveston News*:

Our Island City has lost a valued and old time friend in the death of Albert Robinson, the brilliant authority in railroad and harbor engineering. . . . We were a "feeble folk" when he selected us for his port city. He chose us for the terminus of the Southern branch of the road he represented against an abusive opposition. Our bankers have grown rich with the traffic of the Southwest which he brought to our gates. During his long service with the Santa Fé, he warned our city against its indifference to danger from tidal disturbance. He reminded us that we were two miles out from the mainland and were in the tropical and volcanic zone of danger. He taught us that Venice would not have survived the middle ages without her Lido, but would have been pounded to wreckage by the Adriatic. But we built no new breakwater, and we suffered our disaster.

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

From the *Cañon City Daily Record*, Colorado:

He was at one time chief engineer, vice president, and general manager of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fé Railroad Company, and was supervisor of the construction of the main lines of that great transportation system. By reason of his thoroughness and efficiency as an engineer, the Santa Fé road was built in the most substantial manner and at a minimum expenditure. . . . His skill and ability as a financier were of signal service to the Santa Fé company, and was of inestimable value in the development of the West. . . . The people of Cañon City hold him in kindly remembrance for his marked discretion in the management of the Santa Fé company's interest, and in the avoidance of bloodshed at the time of the controversy for the right of way through the Royal Gorge known as the "Grand Cañon War," when 1,700 men were employed by a rival company for patrol duty along its course. Mr. Robinson played a distinguished and conspicuous part in the "Winning of the West."

From the *Railroad Review*, Chicago, Ills.:

Mr. Robinson was educated at Milton, Wisconsin, Academy, and the University of Michigan, receiving the degree of civil engineer in 1869; the degree of Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in 1870 and 1871; the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws in 1900. In his phenomenal record as builder and administrator, this official item is reported: "On the Pueblo and Denver line, 116 miles in 216 days were constructed; and in the Kansas City and Chicago line, 360 miles in 276 days were finished. The latter achievement embraced permanent bridges across the Missouri, Mississippi, Des Moines, and Illinois Rivers."

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

From the *Engineering Record*, New York City:

Mr. Robinson was prodigal of his energy and attention. Every town and city on the Santa Fé System, from intricate terminals to the least insignificant village yards, bears his personal impress. He was a member of many learned societies. . . . When Mr. Robinson was first employed by the Santa Fé, that line consisted of a mere hundred miles of rails. When he left the road as General Manager and Vice-President, twenty-two years later, it had grown into a system of more than nine thousand miles.

From *Boy Scout Items*:

He was a "lightning calculator" in astronomical field work; in the knack of making instantaneous preliminary estimates he was ranked with minds like Napoleon. . . . Through a long life he never indulged in tobacco or alcohol in any form. He was a faultless listener, always fair and open to complaints. His equanimity was proof against harrowing excitements and distressing delays. The art of giving directions was his and each command was clear, comprehensive, consecutive, and complete. His personal polish in the far West was a protection among prospectors, promoters, land-grabbers, and temporizing legislators. Brawls over disputed claims among squatters and human scavengers furnish materials for dangerous vicissitudes; but he lived a charmed life. . . . His technical library is given to Washburn College. He was an ideal captain for boys and men; a master scout on a great "hike" in a heroic period; a nobleman from every angle; a true knight, without fear and without reproach.

ALBERT ALONZO ROBINSON

From the *Kansas City Journal*:

With at times more than fifty thousand men under his command, and spending millions upon millions of dollars for the men he represented, he never failed to be fair, and no man ever questioned the absolute integrity of any act. Every mile of road he ever built — whether for the Santa Fé or the Mexican Central, of which he became president — was built according to his preference, without his bond and subject to his option as to change and modification, and with the understanding on both sides that whatever he thought was fair should prevail. The history of such men — powerful, far-sighted, rigidly honest, modest, kindly, and gentle — is the best history to which the youth of the land can be directed. . . .

From the *London Lancet*:

When Sir Ernest Castle made official financial estimates for the Nile Dam in Egypt, he sent for Mr. A. A. Robinson, the greatest living authority on Desert Topography and Water Ways, and together they accomplished that stupendous engineering feat which restored to arable land the Southern African desert. . . .

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P. 17

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